

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 CARACA 06556 262153Z

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9234

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 6556

STADIS//////////

EYES ONLY FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY ROGERS, ARA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:

SUBJECT: MILGRP COMMANDER

1. THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE, GENERAL LEAL TORRES, TOOK ME ASIDE AT A RECEPTION ON JUNE 12 TO EXPRESS HIS VERY FIRM PREFERENCE FOR AN ARMY COLONEL AS THE SUCCESSOR TO COLONEL BUSH IN THE MILGRP COMMANDER'S POST. HE FEELS STRONGLY THAT, GIVEN THE PREEMINENCE OF THE VENEZUELAN ARMY AMONG THE SERVICES HERE, THE JOB SHOULD BE FILLED BY AN OFFICER FROM THAT BRANCH OF OUR MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT. THE GENERAL IS BEING EXTENDED AS MINISTER OF DEFENSE FOR AT LEAST THE REMAINDER OF THIS YEAR. I SHOULD NOTE THAT HE IS ALSO A GOOD FRIEND OF THE US AND A MAN OF CONSIDERABLE PARTS-- ONE OF THE MORE IMPRESSIVE LATIN AMERICAN OFFICERS I HAVE MET

IN SOME YEARS OF DEALING WITH THAT BREED.

2. IF WE NOMINATE AN AIR FORCE OFFICER WE WILL AGGRAVATE LEAL TORRES AND HIS SERVICE. I AM UNABLE TO SAY WHETHER THE GOV WOULD REJECT THE NOMINATION, BUT THERE IS THAT RISK AND IT SEEMS FOOLISH TO ME TO RUN IT. IN THE LARGER CONTEXT, DENYING THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE ON THIS ONE WOULD COMPOUND THE PROBLEMS WE ALREADY HAVE IN THAT QUARTER. EVEN IF AUTHORIZATION TO SIGN THE FMS CREDIT AGREEMENT ARRIVES ON TIME, THE DEAL MAY WELL COLLAPSE AS A RESULT OF OUR INSISTENCE THAT ANY LITIGATION ARISING FROM THE

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AGREEMENT MUST TAKE PLACE IN THE COURTS OF THE DISTRICT OF

COLOMBIA. IN THE BEST OF CIRCUMSTANCES THIS LAST-MINUTE
IMBROGLIO OVER FMS IS LIKELY TO LEAVE THE VENEZUELAN MILITARY
WITH A SLIGHTLY SOUR FEELING ABOUT THE USG. WE SHOULD TRY NOT TO
MAKE THE SITUATION WORSE.

3. FINALLY, FORCING AN AIR FORCE OFFICER ON THE GOV AGAINST
THE SPECIFIC DESIRES OF THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE WOULD IN MY
OPINION SMACK OF THE KIND OF ARROGANT INDIFFERENCE THAT ALL
TOO MANY HERE THINK IS CHARACTERISTIC OF THE WAY WE DO
BUSINESS IN THESE PARTS.
SHLAUDEMAN

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